

THE FORUM

A DIGITAL FUNERAL SERVICE RESOURCE FROM THE NEW JERSEY STATE FUNERAL DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION

Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. New Jersey State Funeral Directors Association, Inc.

Updated Guidance on Listing COVID-19 on Death Certificates

APRIL 2020 • DIRECTORS DIGEST

Death Certificates and Burial Permits, Contagious Disease Cases, Funeral Director, Mortuaries (Funeral Homes), Electronic Death Registration (EDRS) COVID-19

As of April 15, 2020, the New Jersey Office of Vital Statistics and Registry has provided updated guidance on how the cause of death should be entered on a death certificate in which a decedent has either been confirmed positive for COVID-19 or is suspected of being positive for the virus.

The guidance, available on the New Jersey's Electronic Death Registration System website, states that COVID-19 is not considered an immediate cause of death and should NOT be reported by the medical certifier on the first line of section 36a (CAUSE OF DEATH, PART I) of the death certificate. Instead, the immediate cause of death, such as "Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome," should be listed on the first line. COVID-19 should be listed LAST in Section 36a after the immediate cause(s) has been listed. See sample below:

BY MEDICAL CERTIFIER	CAUSE OF DEATH 36a. PART I	Immediate Cause - (Enter chain of events (diseases, injuries, or complications) that directly caused death. <u>DO NOT enter terminal events such as cardiac arrest or ventricular fibrillation without showing etiology.</u> <u>DO NOT ABBREVIATE.</u> Enter only one cause per line. Add additional lines if necessary.	Interval Between Onset and Death
	IMMEDIATE CAUSE - final disease or condition resulting in death. Subsequently list conditions, if any, leading to the cause listed on Line a. Enter the UNDERLYING CAUSE (disease or injury that initiated the events resulting in death) LAST.	a. Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome Due to (or as a consequence of):	COVID-19 reporting as directed by National VSS in Report # 3, April 2020
		b. Pneumonia Due to (or as a consequence of):	
		c. COVID-19 Due to (or as a consequence of):	
	d.		
	36b. PART II - Enter other significant conditions contributing to death but not resulting in underlying cause given in PART I	37. Was an Autopsy Performed?	38. Were Autopsy Findings Available to Complete Cause of Death?

If a test for the virus had been performed for the decedent but the results were not available when completing the death certificate, the underlying cause should be listed by the medical certifier as "Pending COVID-19 testing," according to the New Jersey Medical Examiner's Office.

Listing a decedent as “Pending COVID-19 testing” should not delay disposition. Remains considered “pending” may be released for burial or cremation. The *Amendment to NJ Vital Record-Reg 34 form* must be completed and sent to the Office of Vital Statistics to correct the cause of death once the final test results are received.

Guidance for entering information on a death certificate is designed to assist with the accurate reporting to the National Vital Statistics System, which tracks causes of death, including COVID-19.